



When I tell people that I'm a **burlesque performer** the questions that I get asked most often are: "How did you get started doing that?" And, "How do you have the **courage** to get up on stage and take your clothes off?" The following excerpt comes from my contribution to Angel Quintana's upcoming publication *Holistic Fashionista Memoirs*, a collection of soulful stories about women who overcame adversity, found their inner beauty, and **discovered their purpose**. Here, I talk about my first encounter with burlesque and the inner conflicts and body image anxiety that initially stopped me from **living my dream**. Check out the website at [www.holisticfashionistamemoirs.com](http://www.holisticfashionistamemoirs.com) and the [Facebook page](#) to learn more about this amazing book, which will be released in **January, 2014!**

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I had moved to New York in 2001. I was living in the famously hip neighborhood of Brooklyn called Williamsburg. It was there, at a spacious bar and performance space on the street behind my apartment building that I first saw burlesque dancing. I was amazed by the beauty, bravery, glamour and theatrics of it. The girls seemed so smart, sensual, cheeky, and so confident as they danced and pranced and disrobed for the audience. I was captivated.

For those who are not familiar, the historic meaning of burlesque referred to literary, dramatic or musical works intended to cause hilarity with caricature or parody of other serious works, or absurd and over-the-top treatment of would-be austere subjects. The word itself comes from the Italian *burla*, meaning a joke, ridicule or mockery. Later the use of the term burlesque, especially in the United States, referred to performances in a theatrical variety show. These acts had their hey day from about the 1860s to the 1950s. They usually were put on in cabarets and night clubs, as well as theaters, and featured bawdy comedy and the shocking and alluring art of female striptease. The current meaning of the word, especially with the rise of the neo-burlesque movement, which began in the 1990's, refers almost exclusively to glamorous or humorous performances in character, usually involving "tease" and "peel," or striptease.

When I saw these sassy and self-assured women covered in colourful glitter, feathers, tassels and fringe, up on stage, I wanted so desperately to be up there myself. Of course I'd heard all about strip clubs and seen them in movies, though I'd never really been to one. I knew

that was not for me. But here, in the chic urban bar with the reflecting pool in the front window, these women were acting out the dreams that I had begun to dream back in my days of solo candlelit striptease. Of course it was meant to pleasure the audience, but their performances seemed to be equally (if not primarily) about pleasing themselves. They were expressing themselves and boldly stating the beauty of their body, without having to be any certain shape or size. The grandeur and pageantry of old musicals was colliding with the camp of drag shows and making sweet love to my lingerie dreams of yore. These women were pure magic, but they were also real. I could hardly believe something so wonderful existed.

After that night I began to daydream about routines--what songs I would dance to, what I would wear, what sort of statement I would make. But as badly as I wanted it, I was deeply sure I could never do it. How could I be what was essentially an artsy stripper? How could I show my body, my bare flesh on stage? I thought that if I did, I could never let anyone know. It would just be too embarrassing and shameful! My god, what if my mother ever found out?? Unthinkable. I considered hiding behind a complete alter ego, wearing a wig or maybe making some kind of mask my signature look. But I couldn't get over the fear that I would be ridiculed, misunderstood, or perhaps labeled with that that most dreaded of all womanly characteristics... "slutty."

Even besides all those fears, I didn't know how to get into doing it in a practical sense. How did one become initiated in these ways? I had no idea and I couldn't imagine being brazen enough to approach one of the girls after the show and ask. I imagined them as an aloof and tightly-knit clique, laughing at my shabby aspirations through glossy lips. So my sensational burlesque career remained dormant and like so many dreams, it lived exclusively in my head.

Looking back now, it's easy to see that I actually had friends in that scene, whom I could have easily reached out to and begun to learn more about the shimmering and mystical world of burlesque. Clearly, though, at the time, I had too much of a mental block against it to even see that. And of course there was one more glaring obstacle standing between me and burlesque: I hated my ass. I could sustain my disbelief of some cellulite and a delicate purple vein here or there for bikini season, but putting it up on stage, beneath a burning spotlight for all to see seemed like taking it about a thousand steps too far.

In 2006, I began to have chronic health issues that no doctor seemed to be able to remedy with pills. I started to seek out other solutions, and that's how I got interested in energy medicine. I got my first Reiki attunement and also studied another modality called BodyTalk, hoping to find a cure for myself. By the summer of 2007, I had had enough of feeling sick and miserable every winter in New York, and I felt sufficiently steeped in new age jargon to relocate and retreat to the incredibly beautiful seaside town of Santa Cruz, California.

There, every time I walked along the cliffs at the beach or drove up the coast toward San Francisco, which was eternally bathed in its unique brand of rich, golden light, I felt unabashedly self-congratulatory. My poor friends were still schlepping it out in noisy, hectic, over-crowded and over-worked NYC while I was here, in paradise. Poor them. I patted myself on the back. I sipped my raw coconut pineapple shake with blue green algae and a little umbrella on top.

My health issues persisted after my move, but the diet I was on for them made me remarkably thin. I was so happy with my weight and even, yes! the appearance of my posterior, that I was happy to shamelessly wear leggings without a long shirt that glossed over the area. The problem was that it was quite incredibly challenging to stick to the diet, and I felt that I was denying myself all the time or inconveniencing people who were trying to cook for or eat with me.

When I finally cleared up the health issue, with the help of a Naturopathic doctor, I joyously cast off the shackles of the restrictive diet and went back to eating fresh buttered croissants and all the other sinful delights I had felt so deprived of all those months. Unsurprisingly, my butt went back to its former state as well. Much to my dismay.

In attempt to counteract those effects I developed a borderline obsession with Jazzercise. There I remembered that I really liked to dance, and I was kinda good at it. I also encountered the cruel ways of a move called "The Jazz Square," but that's for another memoir altogether.

During that time, I also began to see a guy who had a superlative appreciation for... "it"... you know,... my butt [whispers]. He really was so earnestly and so appreciatively in love with my womanly curves that nine months of dating him seriously began to make a chink in the armor of my disparaging body image. I know it's best to love yourself first, but I found in that relationship that, if someone loves you long enough, and expressively enough--exactly as you are--it can, in fact, help.

I find it so intriguing and a bit ironic that what are largely considered to be male ideals for women's beauty and the objectifying weight of the 'male gaze' act as perpetrators of women's low self-esteem, but for me it was the constant admiration of the opposite sex in intimate relationships that opened the door (as any gentleman would) for me to accept and appreciate my own unique figure.

Just as my tearful meltdown with my boyfriend in New York had shone a lone ray of consciousness into the madness of my warped experience of my body, the spellbound emotional and physical affections of my boyfriend in Santa Cruz presented an enticing taste of what it could be like to experience my own beauty. But I still needed further coaxing and

cajoling, and it came in my favourite form: synchronicity.

Late in 2011, the rainy season was beginning in Santa Cruz, and I had the feeling that I was falling out of love with Jazzercise. I had been musing about burlesque again, and even the psychic I was working with said that he thought it would be incredibly healthy for me. What more proof does one need, really? But grace went a step further, and one day I received an email. It came from a local dance studio. I didn't even know I was on the mailing list for this dance studio, but suddenly I had that amazing feeling that everything in the universe had perfect meaning, perfect timing, and perfect placement far beyond the boundaries of the grey matter inside my skull. The email announced, 'New Class! Burlesque Basics!'

Yea, it was totally one of those moments when you hear the proverbial angels singing in your ears going, "Aaahhhhhhhhh!!!!!!" and you look up at the ceiling, just incase you see one smirking down on you all self-satisfied with their mind-blowing, holy awesomeness. Suffice to say, I was on it. I was SO on it. That Saturday I started class, and changed I my life... decidedly for the better.

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